



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

**REGION 8, MONTANA OFFICE
FEDERAL BUILDING, 10 West 15th Street, Suite 3200
HELENA, MONTANA 59626**

Ref: 8MO

April 17, 2013

Mary Erickson, Forest Supervisor
Gallatin National Forest
P.O. Box 130
Bozeman, Montana 59771

Re: CEQ # 20130078, Jack Rabbit to Big Sky Meadow Village
161 kV Transmission Line Upgrade FEIS & ROD

Dear Ms. Erickson:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region VIII Montana Office has reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) for the Jack Rabbit to Big Sky Meadow Village 161 kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project in accordance with EPA's responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The EPA appreciates receipt of responses to agency and public DEIS questions and comments in Appendix G of the FEIS. We are pleased that additional information has been provided in the FEIS regarding the connected action of construction of 21 miles of transmission line across non-federal land, including information on the access road construction associated with transmission line construction across non-federal lands, and Figure 1 showing the entire 37 mile transmission line route across all land ownerships. We are also pleased that the Gallatin National Forest contacted the Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) in regard to consistency of transmission line construction with the West Fork Gallatin River Watershed Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and Water Quality Improvement Plan, and obtained MDEQ's concurrence and support for Alternative 3. In addition we appreciate the addition of analysis of air quality and environmental justice impacts in Chapter 3 of the FEIS, as well as additional information regarding potential health risks associated with electric and magnetic fields (EMF), and clarifications regarding impacts to wetlands.

As noted in our earlier DEIS comments, the EPA agrees with the Gallatin National Forest's selection of Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative, since Alternative 3 involves the fewest acres of land disturbance (52.1 acres); fewest river and stream crossings; fewest crossings of riparian and wetland habitat (2.1 acres of wetland habitat); reduces scenery impacts to wilderness access at the Lava Lake trailhead; and reduce the number of recreational residences near the transmission line (40 residences within 300 feet of the transmission line vs. 57 residences currently).



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The EPA appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the Jack Rabbit to Big Sky Meadow Village 161 kV Transmission Line Upgrade EIS and participate in the NEPA process. If you have any questions regarding our input please contact Mr. Stephen Potts of my staff in Missoula at 406-329-3313 or in Helena at (406) 457-5022. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Julie A. DalSoglio
Director
Montana Office

cc: Suzanne Bohan/Judy Roos, EPA, 8EPR-N, Denver
Robert Ray/Dean Yashan, MDEQ, Helena